

University of Missouri – Columbia

Fall 2020

Economics 8085: Problems in Economics Syllabus

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Virtual Office Hours (via Zoom or Skype, use Skype: vitor-trindade):

Mon., 8-9 am, Tues., 4-5 pm, or by appointment (email me to set a time).

Note: any changes will be communicated through Canvas announcements.

CLASS DESCRIPTION

Students enrolled in Economics 8085 will for the most part be reading economics papers (with supplemental material to be found in textbooks, as needed and appropriate) in one area of economics that interests them. Before the end of the semester, each student will submit a 10-15 page “review paper,” which will present and organize the state of economic knowledge in the area that they chose.

The ideal paper would be a clear presentation of a subfield in economics that would be understandable to a professional economist who does not necessarily work in that field or subfield. A very good model for review papers, one that every student should strive to achieve, is the papers in the *Journal of Economic Literature*. Just like the papers in that journal, your paper’s presentation, organization, clarity, and formatting, should all be done as close to a professional level as possible.

For students taking Economics 8413 in a later semester: ideally the paper that you write in Economics 8085 should already be done in preparation that class. In Economics 8413, students will be required to write a research paper that is acceptable at the Master’s level. For the most part, each student will simply attempt to reproduce, and perhaps extend, a published empirical economics paper. Since you will be required to have a literature review in the paper you submit for Economics 8413, you can consider the paper you will be writing now as a longer and more complete version of that literature review. For this purpose, some Economics 8413 materials are made available to you. You may want to take a look at them, and plan out the papers for both classes together.

SCHEDULE AND RELEVANT DUE DATES

You need to announce what topic you will be writing on by **Monday, September 21**, that is, at the beginning of the fifth week of the semester. Please do this on the discussion board topic that I will create for this purpose. This means that you have four weeks to choose your paper topic. This is an important period in the semester, as you need to consider what area or areas interest you, and, as discussed above, how to coordinate with your research for Economics 8413. Also important is to choose an area that is narrow enough that is manageable for review in a single paper. Please make sure to watch the relevant videos available on Canvas, and to enlist my help whenever needed, for example: in helping you deciding between two different areas; how to narrow down to a manageable subfield of economics, and so on. You may, and should, start reading some of the relevant papers, to make sure that this is indeed the field and subfield of economics that you want to work in. Even though I do allow topic changes later in the semester, it is time-saving for you to stick to your original topic. Therefore, try to make sure that the topic you announce is the topic that you will want to pursue until the end.

You will then spend the next four weeks finding interesting papers to review in your chosen subfield of economics. This should consist of an extensive search for all the relevant literature, during which you will surely find more papers than you will end up reviewing. This process should be followed by narrowing down the papers in your list to a manageable set, which you do by reading them and selecting the most relevant and interesting ones. Please submit a list (of at

least 10 papers) of the papers that you will be reviewing, by **Monday, October 19**. Again, do this on the appropriate topic of the discussion board. Of course, as your work progresses later in the semester, your original list may change and grow somewhat. But, again, try to have as close to the final list as possible, as that is the most time-efficient procedure for you.

Your final paper will be due on **Monday, December 7**. Send it to me by email.

INSTRUCTOR HELP, CHOOSING YOUR TOPIC, USE OF CANVAS

I am here to help you in writing the best paper you can, and you shouldn't hesitate to ask for my help. You can do so by email or Skype.

I do want to strike a balance between two goals: 1) writing the best paper you can, and using your instructor's help for achieving that; and 2) developing the skill to find the relevant research and to write a good paper independently.

One potentially great way to strike this balance is to use the discussion board on Canvas. Students should try to use the discussion board each time they have a question, and other students should try to answer the questions asked. This will count for your grade (see below). I will be monitoring the discussion board, and intervene any time that may be necessary, but please try to be as active in it as you can.

You can ask and answer different questions there:

- You can ask for feedback on the subfield of Economics that you propose to review.
- You can ask an econometrics question, or perhaps a conceptual question, if there is something you don't quite understand in a paper you are reading.
- You can ask for feedback on your writing.
- And any other question that you think would help you in the paper you are writing.

Besides providing good training on discussing economics, I am hoping that this discussion board can also be a fun way to keep students motivated and making progress in their work.

GRADING

NOTE: grades will be awarded with + / -.

Grades for your paper will be based on your demonstrated skills in the following:

- i. Ability to find the relevant literature to review. I expect you to be critical in choosing which papers to include in your review, and which to exclude. Don't simply include all papers you find.
- ii. Ability to organize the material in a clear, understandable, and attractive way. Try to get your reader (me) excited about the area you are writing about. Try to convince me that the results in that area are important. Try to teach me something.
- iii. Ability to present your work in front of an audience. Because this is an internet class, the "audience" may end up being just me. However, we will explore the possibility of

forming small groups of students, who will present to each other, potentially creating a small audience of 3 or 4 students for each presentation. This will be discussed through Canvas.

- iv. Ability to participate in a public discussion about Economics issues. As detailed above you will be asked to participate in the Canvas discussion board.

HOW TO WRITE YOUR PAPER

Your paper should have several sections. The following is a possible way to divide your paper into sections, but you should take it as a guideline only. Feel free to organize your paper in any other way that you think is best.

- i. Introduction. Explain what your chosen subfield is. Why is it interesting? Why should it interest the reader?
- ii. Literature review. This will probably be more than one section. Try to divide the material in a sensible way. Please bear in mind that a BAD literature review is, at an extreme, just a collection of abstracts of other papers. A GOOD literature review is something like a map. Just like a map locates cities and roads one in relation to another, a good literature review helps in locating each paper reviewed in relation to the other papers that you are discussing. It will probably explain things such as “Paper X extended paper Y [in some way]”; or “Paper X disputed paper Y’s results”; or “Paper X used the empirical methodology prosed in papers Y and Z”; that is, anything that allows the reader to create a mental map of the research done in one particular area.
- iii. Conclusion. Summarize what you have found. What did you learn from your review? What can the reader learn? Is there a take-home message?

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person’s work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards breaches of the academic integrity rules as extremely serious matters. Sanctions for such a breach may include academic sanctions from the instructor, including failing the course for any violation, to disciplinary sanctions ranging from probation to expulsion. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting, collaboration, or any other form of cheating, consult the course instructor.

ACCOMMODATION OF DISABILITIES

Students with Disabilities:

If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need to make arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please let me know as soon as possible.

If disability related accommodations are necessary (for example, a note taker, extended time on exams, captioning), please establish an accommodation plan with the [MU Disability Center](#), S5 Memorial Union, 573-882-4696, and then notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. For other MU resources for persons with disabilities, click on “Disability Resources” on the MU homepage.

INTELLECTUAL PLURALISM

The University community welcomes intellectual diversity and respects student rights. Students who have questions or concerns regarding the atmosphere in this class (including respect for diverse opinions) may contact the departmental chair or divisional director; the director of the [Office of Students Rights and Responsibilities](#); the [MU Equity Office](#), or equity@missouri.edu.

All students will have the opportunity to submit an anonymous evaluation of the instructor(s) at the end of the course.

ACADEMIC INQUIRY, COURSE DISCUSSION, AND PRIVACY

University of Missouri System Executive Order No. 38 lays out principles regarding the sanctity of classroom discussions at the university. The policy is described fully in Section 200.015 of the Collected Rules and Regulations. In this class, students may make audio or video recordings of course activity unless specifically prohibited by the faculty member. However, the redistribution of audio or video recordings of statements or comments from the course to individuals who are not students in the course is prohibited without the express permission of the faculty member and of any students who are recorded. Students found to have violated this policy are subject to discipline in accordance with provisions of [section 200.020](#) of the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri pertaining to student conduct matters.

TITLE IX

University of Missouri policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, pregnancy, age, genetic information, disability and protected veteran status. Discrimination includes any form of unequal treatment such as denial of opportunities, harassment, and violence. Sex-based violence includes rape, sexual assault, unwanted touching, stalking, dating/interpersonal violence, and sexual exploitation.

If you experience discrimination, you are encouraged (but not required) to report the incident to the MU Office for Civil Rights & Title IX. Learn more about your rights and options at civilrights.missouri.edu or call 573-882-3880. You also may make an anonymous report online.

Students may also contact the Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention (RSVP) Center, a confidential resource, for advocacy and other support related to rape or power-based personal violence at rsvp@missouri.edu or 573-882-6638, or go to rsvp.missouri.edu.

Both the [Office for Civil Rights & Title IX](#) and the [RSVP Center](#) can provide assistance to students who need help with academics, housing, or other issues.